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C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 001492

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [SY](#) [IT](#) [HUMAN RIGHTS](#)

SUBJECT: ITALY CONTINUES TO SUPPORT HUMAN RIGHTS IN SYRIA

REF: STATE 77093

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor David Pearce, for reasons 1
.4 (b)(d).

1. (C) Political Minister Counselor met May 16 with MFA Middle East Deputy Luca Del Balzo to deliver reftel, urging that the Italians speak publicly about the need for the SARG to improve its human rights record and release detainees. Del Balzo responded that the U.S., the EU and Italy were in perfect agreement on this subject. He noted that EU ministers might meet soon to discuss another Syrian rights case, that of Michel Kilo, a dissident who was recently arrested in Damascus. Italy's largest daily newspaper, Corriere della Sera, ran a front page article and an editorial about Kilo's case today.

2. (C) Del Balzo also probed for U.S. intentions toward Syria, noting that the EU was very concerned about efforts to push for regime change. He suggested the likely outcome would bring a more Islamist government to Damascus and wondered if that was in our joint interests. Pol M/C responded that the real issue was changing the regime's behavior, especially with respect to the flow of foreign fighters and materiel to Iraq. Syria may be taking some steps to restrict the flow of fighters, but they clearly needed to do more. We also remained concerned about Syrian relations with Hamas and Hizballah, its cooperation with the UN investigation into PM Hariri's death, continued interference in Lebanon, and the crackdown on dissent. Syria was more apt to respond when the international community spoke in one voice, and publicly, on these issues. See septel for Del Balzo's comments on Iraq and Iran.

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